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ABSTRACT

The case against a "remedial" view of English as a Second Language (ESL) is presented, and an alternative approach is offered: an "enhancement" account of programs that aim to improve students' command of English in the course of an English-medium college or university education. The transition from "remedial" to "enhancement" provisions within the academic curricula at The University of Hong Kong is described and assessed. Other related issues include the "academic" or "general" scope of English enhancement programs, and the criteria and processes by which such programs may best be evaluated. Contains 12 references. (LB)

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From "Remedial English" to "English enhancement". (So, What Else is New?)

Desmond Allison

The paper presents and discusses the case against a "remedial" view and in favour of an "enhancement" account of programmes that set out to improve students' command of English as a second language in the course of an English-medium college or university education. It goes on to describe and assess the transition from "remedial" to "enhancement" provisions within academic curricula at The University of Hong Kong. Other related issues include the "academic" or "general" scope of English enhancement programmes, and the criteria and processes by which such programmes may best be evaluated.

Introduction.

Although still in use, the label "remedial English" has never promised a very satisfying account of the work of English language teaching units in universities and colleges. The term "English enhancement" appears to be gaining currency, at least in Hong Kong, as a preferred descriptor for English language programmes in contexts where English is a second-language medium of higher education for the students being taught. It is time to ask how far this choice of nomenclature offers more than new packaging for familiar products, and to judge whether it can fairly be associated with a more adequate conceptualisation of issues and tasks. The rhetorical question in this paper's title, therefore, is intended to commence a genuine enquiry, as well as colloquially to evoke the initial scepticism of many outside (and some within) the English language teaching field towards current conceptions of our work.

The discussion will focus mainly on university education, notably in contexts where English is the second-language medium of education. Particular reference will be made to developments in the planning and provision of English language programmes at The University of Hong Kong (to be traditionally if informally abbreviated as HKU). The author's involvement in this work precludes a wholly dispassionate standpoint, but should provide an informed basis for the description and constructive criticism to be attempted in the course of the paper.

It may be a useful prelude to reflect on how studies in particular settings can contribute to knowledge. A common theme in discussions about language and other educational problems and policies in local contexts, including that of Hong Kong, concerns the special nature of the community and its circumstances, and the extent to which experiences from other contexts may be found relevant, or judged inapplicable, to the local situation. The converse question - how far local experiences may usefully inform people living and working in other contexts - seems equally valid, though it is perhaps less frequently asked.

Difficulties in reconciling general insights with local circumstances can already prove informative to a wider educational community. Any implementation of ideas and theories must take place in a context; some tension between idea and context, as between theory and practice, is a common and perhaps universal feature of such implementation. More specific problems may also not be as uniquely local as is sometimes believed, and useful parallels or analogies can often be drawn. (Indeed, it is frequently the similarity between different situations that limits the international impact of local studies, since these can too easily rediscover knowledge, rather than relating, reinterpreting and extending it.) Provided that educational research is expected to contribute to and enrich our thinking, without necessarily yielding answers that apply independently of context, differences among situations should act as a stimulus, not as a barrier, to shared exploration of important and challenging questions.

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The issues surrounding "remedial English" offer a case in point. There are certainly differences between situations where English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes are offered to non-native English speakers in predominantly native-speaker universities and colleges, as often occurs in the U.S.A. for instance, and other ESL situations, as in Hong Kong, where the student population consists almost wholly of non-native English speakers. While these differences affect detailed argumentation over "remedial English", we shall also find that many concerns are widely shared.

"Ending Remediation"? Insufficiencies of "remedial English" as a guiding concept for tertiary English language work.

The case against "remediation" The inadequacies of a remedial account of tertiary English language teaching (other than English as an academic subject in degree studies) have provided a target for professional criticism in recent years. Swales (1990) states the case succinctly and compellingly:

> ...if there is one factor that has debilitated academic English programs more than any other around the world, it has been the concept of remediation - that we have nothing to teach but that which should have been taught before. (Swales, 1990, p.2).

Swales' comment neatly encapsulates the basic problem, from which others follow. A remedial view of teaching programmes suggests that schoolleavers have nothing left to learn about how to use English, or indeed language, in academic and professional communication, except to the extent that secondary or high schools have failed to cover their own syllabuses. This expectation would seem highly doubtful even for native speakers (whose needs will not be directly considered in this paper), and all the more so for students working in a second language.

Remedial students A related perspective is a belief that ESL courses in English-medium universities are and should be designed to ensure minimal curricular survival for a minority of linguistically disadvantaged or less able students, who encounter serious and persistent problems of a kind that normal students do not experience, or do not need assistance with. Where this view becomes untenable on grounds of student numbers, it may assume another form, in judgements that the mass of students are not up to some "proper standard" - a sorry state of affairs, that is obviously all the fault of the schools - and that students therefore still need remedial help. (Readers are invited to judge how far these hypothetical views are the stuff of straw men or of still-encountered prejudices.) An obvious problem with a characterisation of students as "remedial" is that students themselves may feel stigmatised or may have a poor self-image, and so may well be resentful because they have been assigned to follow ESL courses.

Remedial teachers Another common though contingent difficulty is that "remedial" perceptions of ESL programmes and students may be accompanied by dismissive views, held and aired in disregard of facts, concerning the academic and professional standards of ESL teaching staff. This is especially likely in universities. Remedial teachers in schools can be highly respected colleagues, who are seen to do a difficult job with slow learners, but such a conception has no obvious counterpart in university teaching and learning. More is at issue here than simple pride and prejudice: there may also be genuine fears that "remedial" ESL teachers will fail to appreciate the nature and concerns of academic curricula. Even sympathetic colleagues, who respect the contribution of ESL teachers, are often unclear about the nature and frequent intellectual challenge of English language teaching at tertiary level.

Remedial teaching units Prevailing views of "remedial" ESL programmes, students and teachers typically reflect on the (lack of) status and influence of teaching units that are associated with ESL work. Such units - even though they may be called "centres" - typically occupy the periphery of university life, especially when it comes to wider curricular questions. Once a remedial brief has been accepted, such a state of affairs appears normal and right to many people, since remedial teaching, however laudable, is not what universities are for. ESL units may then find it difficult either to gain access to the more influential university committees or to undertake professional discussions on an equal footing with some (less supportive) academic departments.

Response within the profession From this account, it will not be surprising to observe that English language teachers in many contexts are concerned to rid themselves of the "remedial" tag, as part of an effort to obtain greater recognition of and respect for the work they do, the students they seek to educate, the ESL profession itself, and the centrality of language in the curriculum. If one is convinced (as I am) that students in English-medium universities have important things left to learn if they are to understand and use English effectively in academic communication, and that, in many situations, English language teaching will be of value in and beyond the wider academic context, one will intellectually oppose the labelling of tertiary English language work in terms of remediation. When (following Swales, loc. cit.) this label is seen as not only inaccurate and pejorative, but as debilitating to the English teaching enterprise, then professional opposition to its use will be all the stronger.

"Ending Remediation": Some Cautionary Remarks So far, perhaps, so good; yet such advocacy is not without dangers. Some recent discussions have assumed crusading overtones. In the introduction to her edited book with the programmatic title "Ending Remediation: Linking ESL and Content in Higher Education", Benesch (1988, p.1-2) argues that it is time to abandon the notion of ESL as a form of remediation. She points to a resolution, passed by the 1987 TESOL Convention, that calls for the accreditation of ESL courses in institutions of higher education. This resolution opposes a remedial view of ESL courses, recognising them (in the context of the U.S.A.) as instances of foreign language instruction. It sees such courses as meriting full academic credit for their intellectual demands on students.

Heady and appealing stuff for the profession! We are all sensitive to the question of whether academic "credit" should be granted (or, in more fortunate situations, should continue to be granted) for English language courses. If we pursue this goal, however, we need to be clear about our reasons. A feature of Benesch's account is the extent to which the case against "remedial English" in the U.S.A. is avowedly resource-driven: it is linked to a threat to funding for courses that until recently were accepted as credit-bearing. Not only is the dissatisfaction with the traditional "remedial" label linked to moves by education boards to remove or reduce credit (and therefore funding) for courses so named; Benesch even suggests that:

> One positive outcome of the threat to ESL college credit may be a shift from remedial, skills-oriented ESL instruction, which presents language as a set of discrete bits of knowledge such as "the sentence", "the paragraph" and "-ed endings", toward communicative and whole language approaches... (Benesch 1988, p.1).

One hopes that such developments have been motivated, and that this outcome is seen as "positive", on the grounds that "communicative and whole language approaches" can better help students to make appropriate and effective communicative choices... and not just because the new rationale will help to preserve college credit status. (It is only right to note that the book does reveal ample evidence of curricular concerns and insights.)

A hostile critic, then, or a devil's advocate could have fun with some of the arguments commonly put forward by English teachers. Objections to "remedial English", and aspirations towards credit status for English language courses, can be linked uncomfortably closely to the pursuit of professional survival or advancement. Of course, we can reply that these motives are not in themselves selfish or base; that we believe in the value of our teaching programmes, and of the professional contributions we can make. Nonetheless, the long-term interests of students, universities (and other colleges) and the profession itself plainly call for diagnoses and prescriptions that are primarily motivated by the welfare of "clients" rather than of practitioners.

With this point in mind, it is also crucial to distinguish a rejection of "remediation" as the guiding concept for all tertiary English language work from the very different (and far more traditional) view that there should be no place at all for remedial English teaching in a university. To argue that "remedial English" is a bad name for an entire ESL teaching operation is not to imply that there will be no call for any remedial provision within such operations. As always, we must take care when preparing to change the bathwater.

The case for "English enhancement"

The term "English enhancement" is widely used in Hong Kong at present to distinguish mainstream tertiary ESL work from remediation. Other terms might serve this purpose just as effectively, and arguments for the use of "English enhancement" might be transferable to such terms.

In outline form, the case for describing English language provision at (English-medium) university level as "English enhancement", and not in remedial terms, is that:

all students can usefully develop their abilities in, and awareness of, academic communication. (I am using "academic" broadly here, referring to all communication that permeates and helps to constitute a curriculum; this can sometimes include elements of professional communication.)

development of communicative abilities will be necessary if students are to fulfil their potential in respect of viable contemporary curricula, that take account of rapid and continuing changes in knowledge itself and in societal expectations, and will be essential if students are to be equipped to assume leading roles in later professional life.

these needs are compounded by the problems of working in and through a second language.

in many cases (including Hong Kong), these needs may be affected by changes in the social and educational background of student communities. (Perhaps rather simplistically, one can anticipate that increased numbers of students from less advantaged school backgrounds will have all the more to learn about communicative and study expectations in academic settings.)

(in practice, at least) separate attention to "English" is a necessary element in a university's effective provision for these needs.

When viewed in this way, English enhancement becomes a natural element in a curriculum for ESL university students.

This proclamation raises important questions about the alleged "needs" to be addressed and "abilities" to be developed. It would be naive to suggest that these were wholly empirical questions, since answers will always depend in part on the value attached to particular abilities and the importance of particular needs and purposes. That said, empirical enquiry remains crucial to our work in seeking professional answers. We shall take up this theme later in the paper.

Of course, calling an English language programme "English enhancement" will not and should not suffice to alter people's perceptions and value judgements. To convince students, and others, that what is on offer is significantly more and other than a remedial course will require quite a lot of explanation, negotiation and demonstration.

One danger for professionals at this point is too ready acceptance of an assumption that what English enhancement programmes teach must be "new" in relation to what appears in school syllabuses. Content that is obviously new is initially attractive if one seeks to convince others quickly that a syllabus is not a remedial one. This preoccupation could lead, however, to overly exclusive emphasis on selected areas of academic discourse, or on metalanguage, or on rather narrowly specialised tasks such as compiling an academic bibliography. Such a response would fall into the trap of implicitly accepting a negative valuation of other and fundamental areas of English language teaching that are also properly part of a university programme.

It is surely time that educators, of whatever academic specialism, consciously dissociated themselves from the naive yet pervasive view that learning should take place just once, and that relearning in new contexts is only necessary if previous schooling has been faulty. Difficulties experienced by

university students in such matters as grasping the gist of a written text, or seeing an implied meaning, ought not, on reflection, to suggest to anyone that schools must somehow have omitted or failed to teach "reading for main ideas" or "reading for implied meanings" for more than a decade. Students who cannot cope with such skills at school simply do not reach university. Successful students who do reach university will encounter texts, and problems, that are more advanced. For this reason, teaching that is also more advanced may quite properly concern itself - at an appropriate level of textual sophistication - with skills and strategies that build upon earlier experiences in schools. To dub all such teaching "remedial" on the grounds that students had previously "done" main ideas, implied meanings and the like, would be neither illuminating nor helpful.

There may, of course, be good reasons for concern over what has or has not been taught and learned in a school system. But even when a university is dissatisfied (as what university is not?) with the educational standards of its incoming students, it still has to appreciate and not to deny what these standards are. Entire intakes cannot sensibly be described as requiring remedial help. ESL university students should be actively encouraged to improve their English, but (the point is worth repeating) they should not be stigmatised for the levels of proficiency they had attained on admission to their university courses.

The professional case supported and developed in this paper is that the interests of students and of universities, as well as those of English teachers, are poorly served by a remedial view of tertiary English language teaching as a whole. These issues will now be further explored in one context.

"English enhancement" at the University of Hong Kong: Some features of the situation

Some of the features that will distinguish the Hong Kong situation from that of ESL classes in the U.S.A. (or the U.K., Australia, etc.) also characterise other places where the student population is relatively homogeneous and where English, a second language for almost all students, is the medium of education. Features will be discussed and not just described, but various refinements in argumentation are omitted in this outline.

Students and English language English is a second language for almost all students at HKU. There are no native speaker student norms to provide a comparative basis for determining minimal ("threshold level") expectations for non-native performance in English.

There are, it is true, colleges in America where the majority of students are non-native speakers of English - see Hirsch (1988) - but most ESL students in the U.S. are being prepared or helped to work alongside native speaker students, whose presence affects institutional norms. Of course, many Faculty members at HKU are familiar with native English-speaking student populations in other universities, and some indirect effect on staff expectations of student communicative abilities cannot be ruled out.

Calling English at HKU a "second" rather than a "foreign" language for students might need justification. English is used generally as the medium for lectures and classes (apart from Chinese studies or foreign language classes), and in some tutorials, so it is not confined to the English language class. It is, however, not much used informally by most students. Students' previous experience of English at schools in Hong Kong ranges from widespread formal and instructional use to negligible use outside the English class itself.

University admissions requirements specify a certain level of achievement (grade D or above) in the local Use of English examination, thus selecting from roughly the upper half of the Form 7 (equivalent to 12th grade) population in terms of English grades.

English and academic survival At HKU, improving one's English to ensure academic survival is not a real problem for individuals. Student failure is quite rare, and is not normally attributable to poor English.

It follows that the "threshold level" concept, whereby the aim of an ESL course is to bring students up to a point at which they can manage to operate in an English-medium curriculum, is largely irrelevant at HKU. It is important to be clear on this point, as it is easy to argue loosely (as I for one have sometimes done) that students "need" ESL courses to help them "cope with their studies". There is indeed a widely perceived need for institutionally supported ESL work at HKU to help students to master English in academic communication (and sometimes in professional communication), but any implication of mere survival needs is unintended and unjustified. The intention is to make students more effective and articulate.

Reasons for this wish are not hard to find. There are concerns over the present and prospective quality of graduates, and ultimately of the curriculum. Perceptions of standards, including standards in English, will affect the standing of HKU graduates and of the university, and the value placed on the contribution made by the university to the community. The choice of English as the medium of education is also an important part of the university's local and international identity. For such reasons, the need actively to maintain and enhance English within HKU curricula is broadly recognised in principle.

The curricular role of English can vary widely across programmes. In some cases, immediate demands placed upon students' communicative abilities appear minimal - yet there is a longer-term need for greater fluency by the time students graduate. In other programmes, immediate as well as long-term demands are considerable.

The issue of longer-term needs is important and can become fairly complex. Some students whose English standard is relatively high may also be more likely to take up careers for which an advanced command of English will prove crucial: such students still have important things to learn. (In Hong Kong, systems analysts are said to face greater demands on their English than are computer programmers - because of differences in general job specifications and also in local communicative settings that will affect the need for English rather than Cantonese.) When this point is taken in conjunction with the low probability of academic failure, the argument is sometimes heard that English teaching would in fact be better directed towards the more proficient rather than the less proficient students - an argument that, if taken literally, soon raises anti-élitist hackles. In my view, however, this argument ought not to cause alarm: it constitutes one (sometimes polemically stated) part of a well-motivated case for extending English enhancement provision to all students, rather than restricting it to the less proficient.

One suspects that comparable observations and arguments will apply in many universities where the medium is English and the students are predominantly ESL users. The standards of intake to a university, including English language standards, will depend on the state of affairs in the local schools and community. High failure rates in a university, in many educational systems, would reflect adversely upon the institution. Therefore, the demands of the curriculum tend to be adjusted to what can properly be expected of the incoming student population. These internal pressures, however, will be offset by concerns over international comparability of standards, and over what should be expected of graduates. One consequence, with implications that are not always appreciated, is that ESL-medium universities will need to take action to support their curricula by supporting the medium itself (see also Bruce, 1990).

Communicative expectations A number of questions arise about communicative abilities in HKU, and generally in ESL-medium universities. What expectations do lecturers have of student performance, and what tasks are set? (Low expectations may be reflected in fewer linguistic demands, and hence fewer immediate problems.) To what extent do students become able to express themselves clearly and cogently, in their specialist field and more widely? At what stage, if at all, do such abilities assume immediate importance? While comparability with international norms is to some extent assured through a system of external examiners, there are still fears that many students manage to succeed in their examinations but do not become effective communicators. However, research is needed to substantiate or modify such views.

School background of students A common school curriculum can formally be assumed for the large majority of HKU students. It is relatively easy to determine, from syllabus statements, what schools should in principle have taught. The vast majority of students enter from Anglo-Chinese schools, which

currently teach over 90% of all secondary pupils in Hong Kong, rather than from Chinese-medium schools. Actual experiences in respect of English teaching and use will, however, still be quite varied.

Funding for "remedial" teaching "Remedial" language teaching has attracted considerable government funding in Hong Kong at tertiary level, through the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). The UPGC has reassured receiving institutions that "remedial" English can be broadly defined; the term appears to have been used in order to mark the goal of improving students' command of English (rather than teaching English language and literature as academic subjects). The remedial label has thus been and may still be used by administrators to describe plans for English language improvement. Use has more recently been made of the term "language enhancement", in recognition of arguments put forward by academics. To some extent, this development appears also to be associated with a greater recognition of the role that "academic communication" including participatory activities can play in enriching learning and making it more effective. (The issue of "general English" or "English for academic purposes" will be taken up later in the paper.)

Current plans for English enhancement at HKU.

This account of developments at The University of Hong Kong offers an illustration of processes of institutional planning and change. Readers are nonetheless cautioned that parts of this section may prove to be of primarily local interest.

Remedial provision For more than 20 years, the Language Centre (LC) at HKU has had a remedial teaching brief. The extent of LC teaching activities has been a function of resourcing constraints and has mainly reflected demand that was established in the early years. Thus, for example, most undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts have attended compulsory LC courses, whereas, until recently, only a small number of Social Science students attended voluntary courses. For the Faculties of Science and Engineering, course numbers have been fixed, so that any increase in total intake to either Faculty has brought a corresponding decrease in the proportion of students following English courses (and an increase in those "exempted" from taking these courses). Table 1 shows percentage figures for the years 1988/9 to 1991/2.

Figures in Table 1 (excluding the paper in Computer Science) show that the proportion of students receiving English language teaching in different programmes has varied greatly. The distribution does not correspond to any comparable differences in English language ability across Faculties. For example, an in-house analysis of Use of English results for incoming HKU students in 1990/91 revealed that approximately 64% of first-year Arts students had achieved a grade C or above - the minimum acceptable grade at HKU being a grade D - whereas the corresponding figure for Science students was only 28%. As Table 1 shows, however, some 87% of Arts students, compared with just 26% of Science students, received what was administratively still termed "remedial" teaching of English.

Table 1: Reported percentages of first-year undergraduates per Faculty or Departmental programme receiving in-sessional tuition in English from the Language Centre over a four-year period. (Note 1)

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	Hrs	NOTE:
ARTS	91	92	83	87	60	3
ENGIN.	36	38	34	32	20	4
Civil	0	100	100	100	10	
CS IS	0	0	0	100	48	
SCI	35	35	36	26	60	5
S SCI	20	20	34	67	60	6
ARCH	46	47	41	35	20	7
Surv.	65	61	49	48	20	
MED	16	16	15	14	20	8
LAW	0	0	0	0	0	9
DENT	0	0	0	0	0	10
ED	0	0	0	0	0	11

Notes to Table 1:

1. Percentages were obtained with the help of Language Centre staff; some figures for 1988/90 are approximations.
2. Hrs: class hours in 1991/92.
3. ARTS: Faculty of Arts: percentages based on a placement test; no resource constraint.
4. ENGIN: Faculty of Engineering report-writing course: fixed number (168 students). Civil: oral course for civil and structural engineering students. CS IS: Computer Science - Information Systems: note that this paper in a first-year degree programme is not a "remedial" course.
5. SCI: Faculty of Science: fixed intake, but total intake has grown, hence fall in percentage figure for 1991/92.
6. S SCI: Faculty of Social Sciences. 1990/91 figure from 100% of first-year students for B.B.A. (Bachelor in Business Administration) and 11% of other students; 1991/92 figure - all students except those of the School of Economics.
7. ARCH: Faculty of Architecture - Dept. of Architecture;
   Surv: Dept. of Surveying.
8. MED: Faculty of Medicine. In-sessional course only (also a 6-hour pre-sessional course on medical vocabulary for all first-year students.)

9-11 LAW;DENT;ED: Faculties of Law, Dentistry and Education: no provision. (Law employs its own language tutor.)

R.K. Johnson (1986) comments on the totally inappropriate use of the word "remedial" in the context of Anglo-Chinese secondary schools in Hong Kong. This is because remedial teachers were evenly distributed amongst schools, without reference to the very different student ability levels; thus, remedial students in "Band 1" schools would not have been remedial in "Band 2" schools, and might well have been outstandingly proficient in "Band 5" schools. As Johnson (1986, p.70) observes:

> The only criterion which appears to be satisfied by the distribution of remedial posts is administrative tidiness.

Remedial provisions at HKU, summarised in Table 1, plainly have not satisfied even this last criterion. The insufficiencies and inconsistencies of these provisions in relation to perceived needs have not been lost on members of LC staff, or on some of the less favoured Faculties; however, any response to proposals for more English language teaching has had to depend on availability of additional funding from Faculty or University budgets.

The later 1980s saw considerable community and university concern over language issues in education, and a wider reappraisal was undertaken in HKU of what English language measures were needed. The following outline is intended as a clear if condensed and simplified account of the resulting developments.

Proposal for a 'School of English' Concerns over the English language needs and standards of undergraduates throughout HKU led to considerable critical examination of current provision for English enhancement within the university. The problems were seen to call for an academic solution, and the Professor of English Language at that time, Roy Harris, was prominent among those consulted.

A feature of Harris' stance that attracted wide interest and support in principle, not least among staff members of the LC, was his emphasis on the development of "intellectual fluency" as the appropriate aim for an English enhancement programme. While this term (like most) is open to varied interpretations, its use appeared to serve notice on "remedial" approaches as insufficient or inappropriate to current conceptions of the English language situation at HKU.

In 1989, Professor Harris presented his original proposal and rationale for a School of English. Harris et al (1991) sets out a later version of the proposal (in a document that includes a detailed in-house bibliography). The idea was to establish a School of English that would bring together the university's expertise in all forms of tertiary English teaching (i.e. the Department of English Language and Literature and members of the English section of the Language Centre), together with new posts, in order to address issues comprehensively rather than piecemeal.

Subsequent developments have seen the abandoning of the School of English proposal in favour of the creation of a separate unit for English enhancement, that excludes the Department of English Language and Literature.

English courses in HKU degree curricula? In November 1989, Senate agreed in principle that "general English courses... should be conducted by English specialists as compulsory credit-earning courses for all undergraduates throughout first-degree curricula." This wording did not pre-empt further consideration of what kinds of courses and specialists were appropriate for the task. What may have been intended by "general English" will call for attention below. The term "credit-earning" was imprecise as to detail (critics were quick to point out that the university does not operate a unit-credit system), but appeared clear in principle, and its use in the context of first-degree curricula distanced the university from remedial solutions.

Academic Communication and Study Skills ("ACSS") as a model? In May 1990, a proposal for an "Academic Communication and Study Skills" (ACSS) course was first put forward by staff members of the Language Centre. Although its focus was on induction of students on first arrival at university, the ACSS proposal was language-intensive (reflecting needs perceived by the Department of Management Studies, which was interested in piloting the scheme), and the ACSS scheme has since become associated with the development of English enhancement programmes that have academic communication as their

focus. One result of the initial proposal was an intensive induction course for incoming first-year BBA students in September 1990; another was a 60-hour in-sessional first-year English language course, on a pilot basis and without pre-empting other course proposals for English enhancement.

"ACSS" subsequently became a cover term for the programme-specific first-year in-sessional courses that are being designed at HKU as part of each Faculty's approach towards English enhancement within first-degree curricula. The focus has thus shifted from induction towards language enhancement, seen very much in the context of "academic communication" and of the development of appropriate skills and strategies for this. (Bruce, forthcoming, offers a detailed account of HKU's ACSS course for Social Sciences, in the solely in-sessional form that has been piloted in 1991/92.)

In June 1991, the HKU Senate approved in principle "that English enhancement be integrated into each first degree curriculum, in accordance with the schedule below, (not reproduced here), on the basis that the nature of the programme would be fully discussed and agreed with each faculty in the light of its special requirements." (Senate minute 27 of 4.6.91.) The pilot ACSS course was accepted as the model for these developments, within the process of consultation and agreement that was set out.

It can be noted that "administrative tidiness", and also a form of fairness, is embodied in the plans to extend English enhancement programmes of comparable duration to all first-year curricula. In a context of enhancement rather than remedial teaching, this solution is also intellectually respectable: use of the term "enhancement" in any instance implies that there is room for worthwhile progress, but does not offer an assessment of ability relative to other students.

A point that has caused some confusion in discussions is that the particular ACSS course material being piloted with the Faculty of Social Sciences would clearly not be suitable for most Faculties. While this point is obvious to the course developers, there have sometimes been fears that the adoption of an ACSS model would result in inappropriate material being imposed on other students. It is in fact the model for course development, and not the particular instance, that serves as the basis for other work.

Creation of an "English Centre" The changes that have been outlined required considerable committee work at a level of detail before plans could be presented and endorsed. In 1990/91, HKU's "English Centre" was established, initially as a small planning unit with three full-time posts. Two posts were temporarily filled from January 1991 by four half-time secondments, giving balanced representation from two teaching units - the English Department and the Language Centre. This initiative extended and further formalised the collaboration that was taking place through committee work (relevant subcommittees of the Senate Working Party on Educational Policy), and through limited teaching exchanges.

The need for a separate planning unit has always been open to debate. Those most closely involved with the English Centre have seen its creation, in the form described, as a temporary expedient to advance and give fuller shape to the university's emerging policy on English enhancement. The English Centre has offered a forum for productive exchanges, between selected members from two teaching units, over the educational philosophy of an English enhancement programme and over practical ideas for implementation, including the ACSS schedule that has been referred to. It has also created some distance between these planners and the two teaching units. This may have helped short-term developments, in that the English Centre was not closely identified with one set of entrenched interests or one long-established professional stance, but it is clearly not a desirable long-term prescription.

An independent appraisal by a Working Party on the Teaching of English in late 1991 recommended the creation of a separate teaching Centre responsible for English enhancement, comprising posts in the present English Centre, the English section of the Language Centre, and any additional posts. The recommended name for the new Centre was the Centre for Applied English Studies. (At the time of writing, this name remains a matter for discussion.) The earlier proposal for a School of English including the Department of English Language and Literature has thus been abandoned. It is hoped that some members of the English Department (and of other Departments, such as Curriculum Studies) will take an interest in the work of the new Centre, perhaps by accepting honorary Fellowships.

Defining what "English enhancement" throughout a university should be like, and whose responsibility it should be, can be much less self-evident to the university than it may appear to English language teachers. This is at least partly because courses and teachers that set out to improve students' command of English are still identified in many quarters with remedial teaching, and may thus be viewed with suspicion when academic curricula are being discussed and developed.

In the HKU situation, it is thus encouraging to note that the Report of the Working Party on the Teaching of English, submitted in December 1991, has acknowledged that:

> In the past poor English has been seen as a remedial problem but this is now perceived as a failed approach since students are not motivated by courses which are neither credit bearing nor seen as relevant to their main studies. (para. 3, p.2).

The point should be emphasised that it is the remedial approach itself, and not the courses that were developed under the constraints and the label of that approach, that is perceived as having failed. Indeed, the proposed constitution of the new Centre has given the most obvious recognition and respect to the work and the staff of the English section of the Language Centre, while also sending a wider message that the English enhancement programme requires changes in the terms of reference and in academic accountability for the English courses to be taught at HKU.

English enhancement and its evaluation

In this closing discussion, we examine two broad issues relating to the design and evaluation of English enhancement programmes. Implications will arise for the role of English language teachers in a university, and may suggest ways in which we still need to move away from a remedial past.

General English or English for Academic Purposes? Of the many terminological debates that can beguile academics in the English language teaching field, one persistent distinction has been that between "general English" and "English for academic purposes" (EAP). At HKU, it is probably a fair if simplified summary to suggest that the LC has always been associated with an EAP stance on English enhancement (though this omits considerable in-house debate in the LC itself), whereas many other academics with an interest in the issue of English standards had, and in some instances still have, reservations about the whole EAP perspective and tradition.

This local debate is one enactment of a professional discussion that ranges widely in both space and time. Within Hong Kong itself, issues affecting HKU are apt to be taken up in the course of wider debates over educational standards and values in the territory. In what was unfortunately a somewhat patchily informed polemic at a recent conference, G. Bickley (1991) queried the role of HKU in regard to what we are here calling English enhancement. According to her, the university has at different times seen English as merely a means to its own ends within the academic curriculum, or as a more general end in itself. Bickley's position was that an academic-purpose view of English courses at HKU was not responsive to community wishes and expectations, which would be better served by courses that see (general) English as a goal in itself.

In brief, I would respond by arguing that "general English" proponents typically take an unjustifiably narrow view of "English for academic purposes". They associate these purposes with a narrow register of English, and interpret them as quite restricted even within university life, rather than as being concerned with students' complete experience of English throughout the curriculum. They also implicitly dismiss the curriculum itself, as though it were quite unrelated to professional and other community contexts. None of these assumptions is at all warranted a priori. (I would agree, though, that such dangers need to be kept in view when an EAP course is being designed or evaluated.)

EAP proponents (including myself) tend to see advocacy of "general English" as at best an unexceptionable if vaguely-worded espousal of broad aims, but at worst as a recipe for avoiding any commitment to delimiting what should be taught and learned on an English enhancement course. Use of the term can too easily cover a reluctance on the part of course designers to specify contexts and

purposes they are assuming as they choose topics and develop materials. Comparable problems can arise when "general proficiency" is taken as the object of language testing.

One area where an emphasis on "general" English can retain some practical value among English teachers is in the development of self-access materials. Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning is a vital part of an English enhancement programme, and a particularly wide range and diversity of materials and topics is needed to appeal to the interests of different students. We must accept that the expression "general English" sometimes serves pragmatically in conveying messages about variety. (There still seems no compelling reason to distance such richness from "academic purposes" - since when did "a university education" suggest that personal and intellectual inquiry and interests should confine itself to a core syllabus of approved topics and texts?)

What is at stake here is the scope of an English enhancement programme and its relation to a context. If an EAP course, with its very limited hours, is targetting academic communication throughout a curriculum, and if that curriculum itself is educationally sound, such a course ought not to be unduly narrow in coverage. What it might offer is an immediate contextual focus for the learning, practice and use of English as a medium of education.

As Reeves (1991) has indicated, the criterion of "fitness for purpose" is preeminent in contemporary approaches towards quality in education. Such awareness in EAP course design is not to be confused with narrow instumentalism; there is every reason to avoid such an association when designing EAP programmes and materials to enhance the communicative abilities of students in English-medium universities. In advocating attention to an already wide range of contexts and purposes in course design for English enhancement, one is subscribing to the belief that an improved awareness of these contexts and purposes will be more "generally" productive than an absence of such awareness.

If the status and relevance of EAP in English enhancement still needs to be defended among English teachers, it is not surprising if students, and teachers of other subjects, tend to favour the sound of "general English" and to be initially suspicious of "academic" or any other "specific purposes". A holistic pursuit of "English" can indeed have important merits as a motivating factor; we should not lose sight of this in pursuing a more contextualised approach. A failure to contextualise our teaching, however, in ways that are more than ad hoc for particular lessons, could all too easily lead it back to a remedial role, conceived of as teaching only that which should have been taught before...

Criteria and processes in programme evaluation English enhancement course designers and teachers in many situations have to decide and to explain to others what a course with a very limited number of hours can be expected to achieve, and to suggest how far this is worth devoting time and resources to achieving. With increasing concerns over accountability in education generally, the evaluation of enhancement programmes is now an important professional area in its own right, and there is widespread discussion of language programme evaluation in the applied linguistics literature. For some selected references, see Leung (1991).

A typically central problem in the design and evaluation of an educational programme is to reconcile the reasonable expectation that worthwhile learning should be demonstrated during a course with the wish to pursue complex long-term aims that will not lend themselves to the prompt measurement of gain. The ideal answer is doubtless to pursue the long-term goals through the achievable goals, rather than in contradistinction to them, but this is far from easy to realise in practice. It is already a demanding task to determine goals that are both achievable and worthwhile. Among the difficulties in ensuring a balanced English enhancement course that will prepare students for future demands, there can be a tension between the development of abilities where gain may be more easily demonstrable (as often for oral presentation skills), and other abilities that may be at least as crucial for students but where rapidly clearcut progress is less likely to be experienced (as often in essay and report writing).

A further requirement for a comprehensive English enhancement programme design is for what is learned in an EAP course to be reinforced and developed in a wider curricular context. In other words, the curriculum itself needs to ensure that sufficiently rich academic purposes exist for the use of language, specifically of English. An educational point that can hardly be sufficiently emphasised in this

connection is that improving students' abilities in academic communication (in English) is of central importance to the curriculum itself. Helping learners to articulate, discuss and apply the content of a course is not a sideshow or a minor social accomplishment (as it sometimes seems to be viewed in Hong Kong); the development of these abilities ought to be central to a university education. Language-intensive work then becomes a vital means in the service of greater ends.

The place of language, and specifically of English, throughout the undergraduate curriculum also assumes major importance for an English enhancement programme itself if we look to long-term goals of improving measurable proficiency, of sustaining gains achieved in specific abilities and confidence in aspects of language use, and of encouraging learner responsibility and independence. A comprehensive enhancement programme would need to build appropriate opportunities for language-intensive work into the mainstream curriculum itself (probably in the form of seminar work and project work).

Such developments can only come about as a collaborative venture, of which the potential difficulties will need no elaboration. There are nevertheless some encouraging signs for the planning of such ventures at HKU. The Report of the Working Party on the Teaching of English (1991) clearly recognises the limitations on what any 60-hour course will achieve and the need to effect other curricular changes as part of a full English enhancement programme; it also sees a role for the English Centre in this respect. The School of Business Studies has recently (early 1992) invited input from English enhancement staff in the course of a curriculum review, including plans for a second-year course in Business Communications.

The design and the evaluation of an English enhancement programme are not wholly empirical activities. As we earlier remarked, a lot depends on values that people attach to different needs and purposes for English, and on broad educational values. Recognition of this complex truth should not, however, be taken to diminish the crucial role that empirical enquiry serves in a professional evaluation. Empirical studies will be needed to examine measurable levels of proficiency and specified abilities in using English, and probably also to investigate attitudes and perceptions of students and other concerned parties (such as academic staff or prospective employers). Modes of enquiry could include language tests, questionnaire studies, interviews (provided that they cover a suitably wide range of people), ratings of performance in oral presentations, seminar discussions or report writing, and studies of particular features in student spoken or written texts at different stages of a course.

The case of the ACSS pilot course at HKU in 1991/92 may further illustrate some of these concerns in context. The course lasts for 60 teaching hours, spread over 20 teaching weeks in the first year of three-year degree programmes in Social Sciences, Business Administration, and Social Work and Social Administration. The criteria and processes by which achievement on the ACSS course should be evaluated are being explored and developed in concert with members of Faculty and with students, though decisions remain the responsibility of the course coordinator and team. Achievement of some of the agreed aims and objectives for the course can be evaluated through ratings, by subject and language teachers, of oral presentations of project work and of written project reports, as well as by end-of-course integrative testing of students' abilities in understanding and applying spoken and written source materials to an essay task in limited time. (Some other objectives, such as increasing the willingness and effectiveness of students in asking questions, might also be possible to assess within ACSS classrooms, but this would not be very useful as the goal is to facilitate such behaviour elsewhere in the curriculum.)

One problem in programme design and evaluation can be to convince sceptics of the relevance of whatever objectives may be established or of measures that may be used. If clear evidence of improvement in "English" is being demanded, but with no specific notion of what this involves or of how it should be demonstrated, English enhancement professionals will have an explanatory task ahead of them. ("General English" proves of serious disservice as a guiding concept.) Distinctions between receptive and productive knowledge of English, or between knowledge of the language and abilities to make more effective use of that knowledge in particular communicative contexts can take time for English teachers to convey, and for others to appreciate. Yet such matters are crucial to an informed appreciation of what is being taught and what has or has not been well learned.

Another practical difficulty in the design and evaluation of English enhancement programmes may be, as it sometimes is at HKU, that some members of Faculty and (to a lesser degree) some students appear convinced that students' needs for and problems with English are already well known, and that enquiry into such matters is largely superfluous. In fact, diagnoses reported by academic staff, in interviews and through questionnaires, sometimes vary widely on quite basic points (e.g. as to whether the main task should be to improve students' writing, or to make them more effective as speakers, or to do both), and there is often no obvious reason other than personal predilection to account for these differences. (There are nonetheless some characteristic tendencies. A fairly consistent feature of interview and questionnaire data is that productive abilities are emphasised by staff more than receptive abilities. Students themselves tend to attach more importance to listening abilities - which prove from interview data to range from insufficient command of vocabulary to difficulties with high speeds and varied accents in some lecture courses - but to believe that they have no reading problems.)

Another problem in extending English enhancement work into new areas can be to convince Faculty colleagues who are unfamiliar with or sceptical about the findings of many applied linguists in interlanguage studies that persistence of errors in student speech and writing does not constitute evidence that English language teaching has failed.

Such difficulties are, of course, common in the English teaching profession, and are not specific to one situation. They can be considerable, yet their importance should not be over-estimated. Faculty colleagues and students who are seriously concerned about English are unlikely to fear that the entire English teaching profession is conspiring to complicate a task that should be simple. The difficulties and complexities of advanced language learning are actually widely recognised, and the long and uncertain road towards progress has been the experience of many in learning another language.

To return briefly to the question posed in the title: our main concerns in charting arguments and measures for "English enhancement" have proved to be not so much with innovation as with evolutionary development. As other academics become more aware that language has a place within the curriculum, and that communication serves a role in the development and application of knowledge itself, English enhancement teachers should need to feel less defensive about the difficulties and uncertainties of our own role. Instant answers to many central questions are not available, and academics who give serious attention to "English" issues will appreciate this. They will also expect confidence and willingness on our part to work with them to specify achievable goals that are agreed to be important. In such a climate, our work can more easily move beyond the concept of remediation and can assume its place as an important and integral part of a wider educational endeavour; and we ourselves can become increasingly confident in the judgement and understanding of our academic peers.

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